

Open letter to the Prime minister and minister of finances

In Prague 30.5.2017

Dear Prime minister, dear minister of finances,

We, the doctoral students at all the Czech public universities and the Association of doctoral students, have received the news concerning the already submitted budget distribution proposal for 2018 by the Ministry of finances, with great disappointment. The budget proposal suggests a minimum increase of financial resources for the public universities. The described course of action is directly against the previously accepted resolution by the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic and the government resolution, which both agreed to increase the funds for predictable and transparent financing of the public universities.

The Ministry of Finance proposed 100 million CZK as opposed the total amount of 4.5 billion CZK that is required by MŠMT. The potential threat is the repetition of a scenario from the previous year when the budget situation of the universities remained unchanged. It is not possible to conduct the much-needed reforms, such as reforming doctoral studies, without demanding financial resources.

State university education suffers from the long-term lack of finance. The doctoral scholarship is an alarming example. The received amount remained unchanged for the past 15 years. This results in a situation when the present doctoral students in exchange for their highly skilled and qualified jobs receive financial compensation lower than the minimal wage and hence their income is below the poverty line in the Czech Republic. The average monthly scholarship is equal to 7500 CZK. In addition, many Czech universities have implemented a specific "motivational system" due to which the PhD students obtain even less during their first year. Furthermore, the students are obliged to pay their social and healthcare insurance. Moreover, the internal doctoral students are obliged to spend at least 40 hours per week at the university premises at some universities, the amount of time equal to standard full-time employment contract. Doctoral students usually form a necessary component of qualified human resources for the universities and without their contribution; it might be difficult to meet the research and teaching duties.

Doctoral level does not mean to be only a student, but it is primarily about conducting research that requires a university diploma. It seems disgraceful and impossible to demand excellent research and teaching performance in exchange for scholarship lower than the minimum national wage. A sufficient investment towards future scientists is a usual practice by the governments of Western countries, but even the Slovakian government realised the importance of doctoral students and are offering funding of 545 euros per month until the thesis is handed in and afterwards increases to 636 euros.

The current financing of public universities in the Czech Republic results in thousands of disappointed and demotivated young adults who must spend their time in unrelated work or short-term jobs in order to support themselves financially in order to pursue their career in research. Understandably, this impacts the quality of scientific contributions and the competitiveness of individual researchers

in a worldwide scientific environment, regardless of their scientific potential. The current financial situation of doctoral students hence endangers the future development of science and research in the Czech Republic.

One of the priorities based on the view of MŠMT is to double the doctoral scholarships from the potential funds increase for public state universities in 2018. With this regard, we value the existing activities of Mgr. Kateřina Valachová, Ph.D, the former Minister of Education and her team. We appreciate that even the Prime Minister has numerous worded support with regards to improvement of the conditions for doctoral students including the need of increased financial support. We believe that those claims did not form a part of a campaign, or the package of pre-election promises, but a genuine effort towards finding a solution for one of the major problems in Czech university education, respectively Czech science, research and innovation.

Dear Prime minister and the minister of finance,

We would like to stress that we comprehend the issue of scholarship increase for doctoral students as the beginning of a debate about our status within the Czech society of which we would like to be valid members. We care about returning back all the resources invested to us, back to the state. However, the current situation does not allow it. The present situation is ineffective not only for us, but also for the state. A state that presents the investment to science, research and innovation as one of its core priorities.

One of the conditions to form such a state is a successful development of PhD pursuers – males and females – as future research associates and leading researchers. Doctoral education does not produce only scientists, but also generally a highly qualified work force that attracts further investment. Hence, the increase of financial resources forms not only an expense, but also very much-needed strategic investment. The preservation of the current state would be economically non-strategic. We are convinced that the increase of funds for doctoral students forms an effective investment towards human capital. This might fortify the effort of the Czech Republic to become a developed knowledge-based economy and a more confident country overall.

Sincerely,

Kateřina Cidlinská

The Chair of Czech Association of Doctoral students, z.s.

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